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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 20 October 2011, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Miculescu ..... (Romania)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 55: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/66/21 and A/66/261)

1. **Mr. Iqbal** (Pakistan) commended the continuing efforts of the Department of Public Information to widen outreach through a mix of new and traditional technologies. He expressed appreciation for the Department's work in informing the international media about the devastating floods in his country. With the assistance of the United Nations, his Government was working hard to meet the victims' needs, but it was also engaged in combating terrorism, which affected Pakistan more than most countries, inflicting huge human and material losses.

2. As one of the largest troop-contributing countries for United Nations peacekeeping operations, Pakistan urged the Department to continue to raise awareness of the ground realities, successes and challenges of peacekeeping operations. It welcomed the new peacekeeping website in the six official languages.

3. All possible measures should be taken to strengthen the United Nations information centres, particularly in the developing countries; adequate resources must be allocated for that purpose. The Department should step up its efforts to make available United Nations documents and web pages in local languages. To secure rent-free premises for United Nations information centres from host countries, it was important that the economic conditions of those countries should be taken into consideration while ensuring full allocation of financial support for the centres.

4. Welcoming the exhibition marking solidarity with the Palestinian people, he urged the Department to include Urdu at the forthcoming formal launch, on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

5. Freedom of expression was a universal right which should be promoted and protected; it must not be allowed to create misunderstanding among cultures, civilizations and religions. The aim of the United Nations public information policies and activities should be to promote harmony and respect among peoples; his delegation urged the Department to encourage discussions at regional and international levels to help promote understanding among cultures and civilizations. In view of the importance of accurate, objective and balanced news and information services, efforts to strengthen technology, multilingualism and partnerships in all the media must continue. Training programmes for media persons from developing countries should be strengthened through the provision of professional training facilities in order to correct the imbalance in the world information order. His Government was committed to freedom of expression and free media and had created an enabling environment for private media, resulting in an unprecedented surge in the electronic media.

6. **Mr. Htut** (Myanmar) said information and communications technology (ICT) should be made available worldwide in accordance with the principles of the Charter and international law, so as to enable individuals and communities to achieve sustainable development and improve their quality of life. The digital divide between developed and developing countries remained a source of concern. Imbalances in global information and communications could result in news bias; his country therefore backed the enhanced role of the Department of Public Information. It reaffirmed the need to reduce gaps in the areas of infrastructure, technical resources and the development of human skills.

7. His delegation attached great importance to the United Nations information centres, which produced information on the United Nations in over 150 languages and played a vital role in enhancing the public image of the Organization. He commended the positive role played by the Department in the aftermath of natural disasters through dissemination of information to local communities in the affected areas.

8. His delegation welcomed the initiative under taken by the Dag Hammarskjöld library to expand the scope of the regional training and knowledge-sharing workshops organized for the depositary libraries in developing countries. It shared the view that the United Nations website was an essential tool for the media, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and the general public.

9. Myanmar's new constitutional civilian Government was mobilizing all available means to introduce modern technologies in order to facilitate sustainable development; the necessary infrastructure was being put in place and two ICT parks had been established. The participation of private enterprises in that sector had increased significantly in recent years.

As a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Myanmar had launched an ICT master plan project under the Initiative for ASEAN Integration and the e-ASEAN Framework Agreement was being implemented in his country.

10. **Mr. Sangqu** (South Africa) said that, as the only credible advocate for peace, freedom and justice, the United Nations must have a global voice. As its membership increased and the world's population grew, the Organization needed to broaden its global support in order to address all the burning issues, in particular those affecting developing countries. The Department of Public Information should be central to United Nations strategy, in particular in the preparations for the forthcoming Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference). The Department played an important role in raising awareness of the question of Palestine and supporting the decolonization agenda, in particular with regard to Western Sahara.

11. He commended the work of the United Nations information centres, especially in developing countries. Their dissemination of information in local languages had the strongest impact. South Africa supported the decision to establish a United Nations information centre in Luanda to serve Portuguese-speaking African countries and hoped that it would soon become operational. The United Nations Information Centre in Pretoria should be further strengthened; it was playing an important role in publicizing the Global Model United Nations programme among young people.

12. South Africa was aware not only of the opportunities that new technologies could offer for the eradication of poverty, economic growth and social development but also of the widening digital divide between developed and developing countries. The United Nations should assist in bridging that divide and provide the necessary support and resources, especially to the United Nations information centres in developing countries. Social and new media had been shown to be effective mechanisms for reaching key constituencies on issues such as Nelson Mandela International Day, the International Year of Forests and the Japanese earthquake and tsunami. However, traditional media remained important and continued to serve as the primary outlets in most developing countries; they should continue to be used, so that all peoples were kept informed, in line with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

13. His delegation had participated in the Department's event on 21 March at Headquarters in support of the International Year for People of African Descent; that date was also observed in South Africa as Human Rights Day, in commemoration of the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa in 1960. He commended the Department's initiatives to raise awareness of such phenomena as the slave trade, the holocaust and apartheid, and its support for the Nelson Mandela International Day campaign. The publication of Africa Renewal was invaluable in promoting awareness of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Information and communications activities in conflict and post-conflict situations could play an important role in peacekeeping missions.

14. **Mr. Atabekov** (Kyrgyzstan) recalled that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established the right of everyone to seek, receive and impart information. Acting in that spirit, in accordance with the United Nations Charter and against a background of social and political upheaval, the Secretary-General was making considerable efforts to inform the international community, by means of visits, meetings and declarations. During his 2010 visit to Kyrgyzstan he had provided information about the efforts of the United Nations to guarantee peace and stability and settle conflicts. He had expressed full support for the Academic Impact initiative. The United Nations public information policies and activities contributed to the attainment of the main objectives of human development by addressing issues such as climate change, reform of the Organization, and the Millennium Development Goals.

15. Kyrgyzstan's Constitution ensured that all citizens enjoyed basic human rights, including the freedom of expression. Since the arrival of democracy, the media had grown and dozens of political parties had been formed. The United Nations Association of Kyrgyzstan was carrying out important work. On 21 October 2011, Kyrgyzstan was to be a candidate in the Security Council elections for the first time.

16. **Mr. Uspenskiy** (Russian Federation) said his delegation took a generally positive view of the work of the Department of Public Information and its efforts to develop strategic communications and news services and to keep the international community informed of

the activities of the United Nations. It welcomed the high level of cooperation between the Department and the Committee on Information, which was of great importance in determining the Department's priorities, and commended the initiative to intensify the pace of work during the inter-sessional period, which enabled Committee members to engage in regular exchanges of views.

17. The Department's efforts to develop cooperation with educational institutions and to disseminate knowledge of the work of the United Nations among young people and involve them in decision-making would help ensure the stable development and continuing relevance of the Organization over the long term. Universities in many Russian cities were actively participating in the Academic Impact initiative, and Russian students took an active part in the Global Model United Nations, at both the national and the international levels. A representative of the Russian Federation had been chosen as the secretary-general of the third Global Model United Nations Conference, held in Incheon in the Republic of Korea. In 2013 the World University Games would be held in Kazan, a city famous for its traditions of peaceful and neighbourly coexistence between people of different ethnicities and beliefs. The cooperation between the Department and the Organizing Committee for the Games could be based on the idea of promoting tolerance; the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow, as a reliable partner and a source of accurate information about the United Nations and its role in promoting, inter alia, human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples, could act in a coordinating capacity in that regard.

18. His delegation attached great importance to the events marking the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, in which emphasis should be placed on the role of the military personnel who had liberated the Nazi concentration camps. The events were especially important in fostering an understanding that the tragedy of the Holocaust had not been confined to the Jewish people, but had been a tragedy of all humanity during the Second World War, the bloodiest war in history. It was deeply regrettable that some countries were still tolerating revisionists who attempted to depict the Nazi henchmen as heroes and patriots, a policy which was incompatible with the obligations assumed by those countries under the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, attempts to glorify the accomplices of Nazism ran counter to one of the most important goals set forth in the Charter — to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

19. While the Department was making increasing use of its website and of Internet resources such as Twitter, Facebook and You Tube, it was important to continue developing the traditional, but by no means outdated channels of communication such as United Nations Radio and Television and the United Nations news centres, which were becoming increasingly popular. He hoped that the Department would be provided with the necessary financial, technical and human resources to continue its work.

20. Multilingualism, and the maintenance of parity among the official languages, was a prerequisite of the Department's work. Although the Department was endeavouring to improve the multilingual content of the United Nations website, there were certain difficulties in doing so, not least the fact that many departments of the Secretariat were supplying material in the English language alone. There should be no departure from the principle of multilingualism. More Russian-language information about the work of the United Nations would be useful, such as that provided by the United Nations News Centre in New York. For many people in the Russian Federation, from schoolchildren to professional journalists, the Centre's materials were a regular part of their daily news diet. The Russian language portal of the Centre should be adequately resourced in line with the principle of language parity. The Russian service of United Nations Radio, and especially its daily news bulletin, disseminated information about United Nations activities to a worldwide Russian language audience. Russian language broadcasts contributed to propagating the ideals of the United Nations while strengthening the position of the Russian language and encouraging multilingualism.

21. His delegation commended the efforts of the Department to develop its partnership with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society sectors. The annual conferences organized by the Department with NGOs enabled the latter to extend their contacts and improve their knowledge about the work of the United Nations and its partner organizations in other parts of the world.

22. **Mr. Askarov** (Uzbekistan) emphasized the importance of impartial and balanced information about international and regional developments, and about current issues in international politics and the world economy. Such information was especially important for developing countries, which often lacked the means of disseminating information of significance to them to their own and the wider international public. Modern information and communications technologies could be used both to help and to harm the interests of peoples and States and to promote or hinder sustainable development and international security. The United Nations, as the sole international organization whose legitimacy was uncontested, must remain a benchmark for the development and use of such technologies. He expressed appreciation for the work of the United Nations public information services in the six official languages, which served as a means of communication for over two thirds of the world's population.

23. The study of foreign languages had gained much ground in Uzbekistan over recent years, and especially the study of English. Almost one third of young people below the age of 25 could express themselves in English, although Russian was still the lingua franca for older people. Thanks to the work of the Russian news service of the United Nations, the people of Central Asia, and especially Uzbekistan, had become much better informed about United Nations activities, the priorities of the Secretary-General, and the principal areas of work of the General Assembly and other organs of the United Nations. That service must therefore be adequately funded and resourced.

24. More coordinated action was called for on the part of Member States in observing the existing norms and standards applying to information and communications technologies, which represented a rapidly growing part of the economy. Fostering the potential of those technologies, and creating the conditions for stable and secure development, must be a key part of efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

25. **Mr. Chabi** (Morocco) said that there had been a sea change in the means of gathering, producing and disseminating information. The Department's mission to inform, engage and act would require the use of both traditional and new media. His Government hoped that special attention would be paid to the needs of African countries in that regard.

26. The United Nations information centres played a key role in informing civil society about the activities of the United Nations at the national, regional and international levels. Their mission was especially important in the developing countries where modern information technologies were lacking. The Rabat centre was actively involved in informing the Moroccan public about the work of the United Nations; over the past year it had cooperated with several Moroccan universities on such issues as the Millennium Development Goals and climate change.

27. He welcomed the continuation of the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine, which was an important means of raising awareness about the situation in the Middle East. The training component for Palestinian journalists was also valuable.

28. Multilingualism was an essential dimension of the work of the United Nations; since linguistic parity had not been achieved, the Department should redouble its efforts to promote the use of all six official languages. Multilingualism and dialogue among civilizations were two of the key identifiers of the Organization and of the values of diversity and tolerance; the Department should therefore promote more initiatives in that connection.

29. As a troop-contributing country, Morocco called for increased communication about peacekeeping operations and their essential role in the maintenance of international peace and security. The Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations should build a multidimensional media strategy to communicate the success story that was United Nations peacekeeping. It was regrettable that the media often focused on isolated failures of peacekeeping; it was time to set the record straight. Close communication between the Department of Public Information, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support was essential to the effective management of peacekeeping operations and better communication of the Secretary-General's good offices for the maintenance of international peace and security.

30. The Arab Spring had clearly demonstrated the central role of social media. The United Nations must meet the challenge of making increased use of new information and communication technologies. His

delegation welcomed the Department's efforts to improve the United Nations website and make it more user-friendly.

31. **Mr. Nwosa** (Nigeria) said that the unequal access to the information highway, to the disadvantage of the developing countries, and Africa in particular, remained a source of concern. While modern information and communication technologies benefited the international community, traditional means of information and communication were still essential.

32. His delegation stressed the central role that the Department of Public Information could play in the peacekeeping process and underlined the need for partnership with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. By disseminating positive information ahead of time, the Department of Public Information could ensure the peacekeepers were well received by host communities.

33. For sustainable development to become a reality, particularly in the developing world, the factors hindering development must be tackled holistically. The Rio+20 Conference would therefore be significant for developing countries, whose voices needed to be strengthened; through its global network, the Department needed to ensure access to information on all aspects of the issues, particularly for local communities.

34. For Nigeria, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) represented a goal to be reached through achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. His delegation urged the Department to sustain the momentum of its campaigning efforts with regard to HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, which together had caused countless deaths in Africa and were undermining the prospects of sustainable development.

35. **Mr. Bousselmi** (Tunisia) said that the issues under discussion were of great interest to his country, which was entering a crucial stage of its history following a peaceful revolution based on guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of all persons, and especially the freedom of expression.

36. The achievement of linguistic parity in the United Nations system was an ambitious but not impossible goal; lack of resources should not be an impediment to the use of Arabic, as one of the official languages, and the improvement of the Arabic website. Tunisia commended the Department of Public Information for its efforts on the question of Palestine and urged it to continue providing information through regional seminars and other activities. Many developing countries lacked the capacity to be able to keep up with technological developments; the wide North-South digital divide must be bridged. The Department played a crucial role in promoting the work of the Organization and sensitizing the people of the world to the current issues.

37. **Mr. González** (Cuba) said that while the advances in science and technology were a positive factor and the potential benefits of information technologies for education, medicine and other areas education were vast, the use of new information technologies could also pose a serious threat to international peace and security and the fulfilment of the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. According to recent International Telecommunication Union (ITU) statistics, 70 per cent of the world population had no access to the Internet — nearer 80 per cent in developing countries and higher still in the case of broadband. Even if universal access to information and communications technologies were possible, it was not clear what use computers and the Internet would be to the millions of people around the world who were illiterate and living in extreme poverty. Yet a tiny fraction of global spending on arms could eliminate the digital divide.

38. The United Nations information centres should continue to play a central role in the dissemination of balanced information, taking into account the needs of the target audience. His delegation welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Information Centre in Luanda, Angola. Traditional media should continue to be used to reach the large numbers of illiterate people in the world's South.

39. The Government of the United States of America was continuing its radio and television aggression against Cuba, in flagrant violation of international law and of the regulations of ITU. The illegal transmissions, containing false and twisted material intended to destabilize and subvert, disrupted the normal operation of radio communications and interfered with the reception of six Cuban television stations listed in the Master International Frequency Register. The Radio Regulations Board of ITU had urged the United States Government to stop the interference and Cuba had repeatedly denounced the

aggression in many forums. Nevertheless, each year the United States Congress approved federal funding of over US$ 30 million for the transmission to Cuba of thousands of hours of broadcasts, some of which were made from military and other aircraft. Such broadcasts posed a clear threat to international peace and security. Of the 23 broadcasting stations which transmitted programming to Cuba, 3 were owned by the United States Government, and others were connected with known terrorists living in the United States. His Government called on the United States Government to cease immediately its illegal broadcasts to Cuba, along with its failed embargo against the Cuban people, which had caused over $7 million of damage to the ICT sector in the past year alone.

40. **Mr. Pintado** (Mexico) reiterated his country's support for the Department of Public Information and, in particular, commended the improved access to and digitalization of its documents and photographic archives. Mexico welcomed the growing participation by civil society in events organized by the Department, including the preparatory conferences for the Rio+20 Conference and the Academic Impact initiative, in which seven Mexican universities had participated. His Government maintained an excellent level of cooperation with the United Nations Information Centre in Mexico City, which had undertaken several projects to disseminate information in Mexico and across the region, especially among young people. The Centre had concluded an agreement with the Instituto Latinoamericano de la Comunicación Educativa, which specialized in distance learning. It was also involved in a capacity-building programme covering 70 Latin American libraries. His delegation took note of the proposal by the Egyptian delegation for cooperation between the information centres in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria.

41. His delegation welcomed the use by the United Nations of new forms of communication such as social media and the updating of the Department's website. At the same time, it urged the Department to strike a balance between new technologies and traditional media, without incurring additional budgetary expenditure.

42. Full access to information was critical not only for enjoying human rights but also for fostering economic development and promoting education. Mexico therefore stressed the importance of multilingualism and language parity and emphasized the need for the Department to make key information materials available in Spanish in both traditional and new media. Mexico was third in terms of the number of visits to the United Nations website and had the highest number of Facebook users in Latin America.

43. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for Palestine) stressed the importance of the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine, which was instrumental in raising the international community's awareness of the rights of the Palestinian people, including their inalienable right to self-determination, and the regional and international efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. His delegation commended the Department of Public Information, and in particular its Palestine section, for organizing activities and events related to the Programme, including the annual international media seminars on peace in the Middle East. It also commended the Department for launching the new permanent exhibition on the question of Palestine at Headquarters and for developing the archives of films and videotape documentaries. His delegation reaffirmed the importance of the annual training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists from the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Department should undertake the other activities requested in by the General Assembly in relevant resolutions, including the organization of fact-finding missions for journalists to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to Israel, and the expansion of the Department's collection of audiovisual materials on the question of Palestine. He hoped that the Palestine Section of the Department would receive sufficient funding and staff to enable it to fully implement its mandate. He reiterated the call to the Department to reinstate the link on the Question of Palestine on the United Nations website.

44. The Israeli occupying forces continued to target journalists who reported on Israel's illegal, aggressive and destructive policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. In addition to a campaign of arrests and detention, the occupying forces had used rubber bullets, tear gas and even metal grenades against Palestinian and foreign journalists and photographers covering peaceful demonstrations against the confiscation of Palestinian land for the construction of the illegal annexation wall and settlements. Illegal Israeli settlers also continued

their acts of violence and terror against Palestinian and foreign journalists. The Committee, and international organizations, should step up their efforts to protect Palestinian and foreign journalists and ensure that they could work without the limitations of Israeli censorship and the threat of military force against them.

45. The Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology attached great importance to the development of information technology. However, Israeli control of communications in Palestine deprived the Palestinian people of direct access to communication services and information technology. As part of its institution-building efforts, the Palestinian leadership was striving to create ICT networks to reach all Palestinians and help them overcome the impediments to normal life and development imposed upon them; it was also endeavouring to protect journalists so that they could work freely and safely. New television and radio legislation was being drafted with the participation of media professionals and freedom of speech activists, and the staff of government agencies were being trained in media law and the rights and obligations of journalists. Several Palestinian non-governmental organizations were making efforts in that regard. The Palestinian Centre for Development and Media Freedoms had issued a legal guide for journalists in May 2011; the Arabic Media Internet Network was also active in the development of the independent media sector in Palestine.

Adoption of draft resolutions

46. **The Chair** drew attention to the two draft resolutions on questions relating to information contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/66/21, chap. IV): draft resolution A, entitled "Information in the service of humanity", and draft resolution B, entitled "United Nations public information policies and activities". Neither draft resolution had any programme budget implications. It was her understanding that the Committee wished to take action on the two draft resolutions jointly.

47. *Draft resolution A and draft resolution B were adopted.*

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.